

IN FAVOR OF:

HOUSE BILL 5360

**TESTIMONY OF JEFFREY NIELSEN
CRIME PREVENTION/PRESS INFORMATION OFFICER**

**MILFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT
430 BOSTON POST ROAD
MILFORD, CT 06460
(203) 783-4739
crime1@ci.milford.ct.us**

MEMBER OF THE MILFORD PREVENTION COUNCIL

MARCH 6, 2012

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, my name is Jeffrey Nielsen, and I currently serve as a Crime Prevention Officer with the Milford Police Department. During the past 18 years of service, I have been involved in many situations where youths have been in possession of alcohol, tobacco, drugs and related paraphernalia. I am also a member of the Milford Prevention Council serving on various committees. But more importantly, I am a parent of two children and share the same concern as other parents, which is keeping our children safe.

I am here today to speak in favor of bill 5360 as it pertains to items and products that are dangerous to the health and well being of persons under the age of 18 years old. I wish to thank those who drafted this language and support creating laws that will protect children in the state of Connecticut. In our communities, law enforcement officers and educators work collaboratively through programs such as DARE, juvenile diversionary programs and others to educate youth on the negative effects of tobacco usage and encourage them to live healthy lives. Tobacco, commonly referred to as a "gateway drug", is very accessible in our society, being sold at several locations in towns and cities across our state. Tobacco usage among school aged children is highest among students ages 12-14 years old. Despite the warnings and medical problems associated with using tobacco products, people are using, selling and promoting these tobacco products on a daily basis.

In Connecticut, there are 4,681 licensed retailers that sell tobacco products. In many of these locations, tobacco paraphernalia including but not limited to rolling papers, smoking pipes, air driven and water pipes, smoking tubes and masks, and bongs are displayed for sale. In addition, many of these tobacco paraphernalia items are referred to as "drug paraphernalia" on the Drug Enforcement Administration's website.

The proposed language in this bill is intended to prohibit anyone from selling any substance, item or product listed in subsection (a) of this proposed bill. Respectfully, I

am requesting consideration to strengthen the language to mirror the current statutes that apply to tobacco and minors which are:

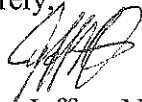
*53-344(b) Illegal sale, giving or delivery of tobacco involving minors, 53-344(c)Purchase or Misrepresentation of age to purchase tobacco by a minor and 53-344(c)** Possession of tobacco by a minor in a public place.*

These current statutes have clear and effective language which addresses areas concerning minors under the age of 18 in regards to sale, giving, delivery, purchasing, misrepresentation of age and possession of tobacco in a public place. By revising the language in Bill 5360 to reflect the current statutes, we will be able to restrict youth access to smoking materials. Also, I would suggest language that addresses possession of tobacco and tobacco paraphernalia in a private setting synonymous with current underage alcohol statutes.

In late 2011, I had the opportunity to speak with a Juvenile Probation Officer regarding concerns of his clients' parents. Their children had informed them that they were smoking incense products that were being sold legally in stores so they could get high. In addition, these youths believed that these substances in their body would not be detected in a urine test for the presence of drugs. Based on this information, I visited one of our local smoke shops. One employee informed me that youth would congregate outside the store and ask adults to buy them smoking products. Based on this information, we increased police presence in the area to deter these types of activities from occurring.

When we reflect on the reasons why children may use tobacco or other harmful substances, we realize they battle with such things as curiosity, peer pressure, insecurity, boredom and escape from their problems. It is our responsibility to educate, protect them and reduce any harmful opportunities that may entice our youth to make unhealthy decisions. Please consider Bill 5360 and any revisions in the language that will assist us in safeguarding our youth through awareness, education and enforcement.

Sincerely,



Officer Jeffrey Nielsen
Milford Police Department